DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 256 EA 019 596

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TITLE Is Our Understanding of the Hidden Curriculum Hidden From Us?
PUB DATE Sep 86
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented the 1986 Conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia (Armidale, Australia, September 1-7 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Existentialism; Foreign Countries; *Hidden Curriculum; Humanitarianism; *Political Socialization; *Politics of Education
IDENTIFIERS *Australia; Functionalism; Marx (Karl)

ABSTRACT

Literature on the hidden curriculum suggests an essential meaning behind either "unintended consequences" or "latent functions" of formal curricula, but this claim is largely unfounded. Four major perspectives underpin studies in this area: functionalism, Marxism, humanitarianism, and existentialism. This paper demonstrates how in each case the hidden curriculum concept is reified and used to focus community attention on its proponents' political ideals. The dialectical understanding of curriculum in terms of power, ideology, and resistance, as the radical critic Giroux advocates, is reduced to a potential rhetoric no more sophisticated than that of his conservative or liberal opponents. This paper further argues that while it is difficult and impracticable to dispense with an educational concept so imbedded in our culture, there is an inherent danger in uncritical acceptance of this concept's existence. Such misbelief will increase the chances of hidden curriculum's exploitation by educators, particularly when trying to justify policy decisions. One table, 4 figures, and 32 references are included. (Author/MLH)

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Paper Presented to the

1986 Conference of the

Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia

1 - 7 September

at
University of New England
Armidale

Is Our Understanding of the Hidden Curriculum Hidden from Us?

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ABSTRACT

Literature on the hidden curriculum tends to suggest that there is an essential meaning of the concept but this claim is unfounded. Four major perspectives underpin studies in this area: functionalism, Marxism, humanitarianism and existentialism. This paper demonstrates how in each case the concept of the hidden curriculum is reified and is used as a lens to focus community attention on its proponent's political ideals. This paper further argues that while it is difficult and impracticable to dispense with such a concept in educational discourse because of its relationship to the ongoing praxis of culture, there is an inherent danger in the uncritical acceptance of the assumption that a hidden curriculum exists. Such misbelief will increase the chance of the concept being exploited by educators, in justifying their policy decisions in particular.

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Is Our Understanding of the Hidden Curriculum Hidden from Us?

I. The Ontology of the Hidden Curriculum

In a paper presented to the Philosophy of Education Society in America, Denis Phillips (1980) raised the question of why the hidden curriculum is hidden. He argues that it is hidden because writers are confusing the "unintended consequences" of the "educational plans that we design for good--and manifest--purposes" with their "latent functions" which are used as a tool to explain educational phenomena that cannot be fully accounted for by the manifest functions of education. He stresses that "it is not a *function* of the curriculum that it trains some students to be obedient to authority, or to accept failure; but it may be an unintended consequence." He also pointed out four related issues in debates on the hidden curriculum: "When did it become hidden?" "Is there only one hidden curriculum?" "Can we recognize the hidden curriculum when we stumble across it?" and "What are we going to do with it after we find it?" It is not my intention here to dispute Phillips's logic of argument but I am concerned that discussions on the hidden curriculum are misdirected.

Phillips might (because he only says that "it may be an unintended consequence") have demolished one of the conceptions of the hidden curriculum--the latent functions of the curriculum--but in its place he has built another--the unintended consequences of education. Further, by raising the questions in the way Phillips did we unconsciously presuppose the existence of the hidden curriculum--as an objectified entity. Hence we are eager to unveil its countenance. *This is where discussions on the hidden curriculum went astray.* Phillips is not the only one who thinks in this way; other scholars tend also to follow a similar approach. Elizabeth Vallance (1973/74), for example, talked about "hiding the hidden curriculum" and Jane Martin (1976) asked, "What should we do with the hidden curriculum when we find one?" This phenomenon, the assumption of the existence of the hidden curriculum and the quest for an essential concept of it, I shall argue, is a factor contributing to our understanding of "the hidden curriculum" being hidden from us.

To be able to assert that something exists it is necessary for us to describe the attributes of that entity in such a way that we can recognize it (most probably in the form of an artefact). In other words, we are imputing the essential concept of the hidden curriculum. Nevertheless, I shall argue that even if we can eschew the identity between attributes and essential concept, we are still faced with at least two other problems: an empirical one as well as a logical one.

One unfortunate aspect about debates on the hidden curriculum is that they represent only speculations of scholars. Even an ardent proponent of the hidden curriculum theory like Robert Dreeben (1976) concedes that

> Actually, we do not know in any hard, empirical sense [about the hidden curriculum]; the evidence for its existence and effects is rather thin, and for all we know it may go the way of phlogiston. There is a case to be made, however, largely on grounds of plausibility and to a lesser extent of suggestive empirical evidence. (p.114)

Other writers tend also to agree that empirical evidence is lacking. This however does not mean that no empirical work has been carried out. On the contrary, numerous field studies have been conducted, especially during the past few years. Anyon (1981), for example, investigates how the "curriculum-in-use" differs from the school "curriculum" and how the former contributes to the reproduction of unequal class structures. Comfort (1984), on the other hand, inquires into how the school's environment, functioning as the "operational curriculum", promotes student self-confidence, hard work, co-operation, and so on. The problem with this approach, as with any other kind of empirical inquiry, is that hypotheses formulated, whether they be statistical or working hypotheses, are typically underpinned by certain theoretical assumptions. In Anyon's case, the theoretical underpinning is Marxism, but in Comfort's case, it is functionalism. If these assumptions are faulty, the findings become suspect. I shall demonstrate below that one such faulty assumption is the existence of the hidden curriculum.

Logically, arguments for the existence of the hidden curriculum are often circular. The literature has suggested numerous attributes and, for the purpose of analysis, I have classed most of the more popular ones into "phenomenon", "process", and "product" as shown in the following table.

Table 1
Attributes of the Hidden Curriculum

Terms used in literature	Postulated implication /state of existence	Opposite used/implied	Description
hidden	existence possible; not seen by various people to varying degrees.	explicit; transparent	phenomenon
latent	existence possible; under cover.	explicit	phenomenon
silent	existence possible; known but not declared.	stated	phenomenon
unconscious	existence possible; unaware of existence.	conscious	phenomenon

Attributes of the Hidden Curriculum
(continued)

Terms used in literature	Postulated implication /state of existence	Opposite used/implied	Description
tacit	existence felt but cannot be described.	explicit; stated	phenomenon
understood	existence known as a matter of course but not explained.	clearly stated	
implicit	existence uncertain but can be interpreted from the known.	explicit	
taken-for-granted	similar to 'understood'	conscious	
unseen	suggests existence; not seen (casually).	explicit	
unobserved	suggests existence; not observed (deliberately).	stated; observed	
unstudied	suggests existence; not studied (deliberately or unworthy of being studied).	studied; stated	
covert	existence possible; similar to 'hidden'.	stated	
unplanned	not part of formal design but used as a strategy.	planned	process
unwritten	not written into formal design but used or followed.	written	
informal	similar to unwritten but suggests casualness.	formal	
curriculum-in-use	interpretation of formal design in implementation.	curriculum proper	
operational	similar to above but suggests more deliberation	curriculum proper	

Attributes of the Hidden Curriculum
(continued)

Terms used in literature	Postulated implication /state of existence	Opposite used/implied	Description
untaught	no teaching input.	stated; taught	
unintended	not conceived; unaware of.	stated	product
unanticipated	similar to above but more accidental.	stated	
societal	programmatic definition.	formal	

By "phenomenon", I mean a static state of affairs before any interaction between its constituent parts takes place; "process" a course of action in progress; and "product" the end result of a certain phenomenon and process.

The school environment and its physical and social settings are examples of the first category. Jackson (1968) claims that academic failure "usually boils down to a failure to comply with institutional expectations". Snyder (1970) describes the academic institution as "the ecological trap"--the context, the emotion and social surround, of the formal curriculum". And Getzels (1974) submits to the silent and yet irresistible work of the school buildings that tell us who we are and what we must do.

In the second category, socialization and the shaping process of schooling are predominant features. Bowers (1974) asserts that "the press of school routine shapes the student's sense of reality in a far more effective manner than the regular curriculum"; and Apple (1980) deplores the "black box" metaphor of schooling.

As for the third, we have already come across the more popular conceptions such as unintended consequences referred to by Phillips. Nonacademic outcomes of schooling such as psychological changes and normative outcomes as claimed by Dreeben (1968) are also representative attributes of this category.

Although it is not explicitly argued for, writers tend to suggest a certain link between these attributes, and proceed to argue as if a hidden curriculum exists. Implicit arguments usually go something like this: "Since schools exhibit certain phenomena conducive to the learning of nonacademic matters and since the process of schooling is such that students are socialized, consciously or unconsciously, in a way congruent with these phenomena, unintended learning is a consequence. Therefore, the hidden curriculum exists." But if we replace each attribute by the term "hidden curriculum" (and it is

quite legitimate to do so because each has been identified as an attribute of the hidden curriculum), we have the statement that "*a hidden curriculum has, through a hidden curriculum, produced a hidden curriculum*". Undoubtedly, this form of the argument is a bit hard to digest even though it is deductively valid. The only trouble is of course that we can always start with a false premise--the existence of the hidden curriculum --and still come to the correct conclusion.

Apart from the above attributes, many others, such as pervasiveness, persistency, and consistency, have been postulated. They seem to belong to a different category but similar arguments to the above can be offered to show that they do not support the speculation that a hidden curriculum exist. In fact, the multiplicity of attributes suggests that anything which is not part of the formal curriculum is a hidden curriculum. Consequently, we are faced with the difficulty of knowing what counts as a hidden curriculum. At this point, I am reminded of Phillips's (1980) analogy of the search for the Holy Grail. As Phillips ponders, the knights might be able to recognize it "when they did stumble across it", whereas current researchers may not be so fortunate in identifying the hidden curriculum even if there is one standing in front of them. And this is where the main problem of empirical studies on the hidden curriculum lies.

Even though we cannot prove conclusively that a hidden curriculum exists, there is nothing to stop us from thinking about or even believing in its existence. One can argue conversely that if we are able to find an essential concept of the hidden curriculum, the problems encountered above will resolve by themselves.

Philip Jackson (1968) originally coined the term "hidden curriculum" when he claimed in his book *Life in Classrooms* that

> the crowd, the praise, and the power that combine to give a distinctive flavour to classroom life collectively form a *hidden curriculum* [my italics] which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school. (pp.33-34)

If we accept Wittgenstein's dictum that the meaning of an utterance is a function of the latter's use in language, we are confronted with the difficulties of separating "hidden" from "curriculum" in the term "hidden curriculum" which can only be understood in its original context. Thus, if there is any essential concept of the hidden curriculum at all, it refers to Jackson's collective effect of "the crowd, the praise, and the power".

Unfortunately, the multifarious interpretations of this term and the indiscriminate use of many other similar terms, such as "implicit curriculum", "covert curriculum", and so on, in the past decade and half outgrew our imagination. The popular conceptions of the "unintended consequences of education" I referred to previously do not seem to accord with Jackson's intention. My own research indicates that it is very difficult if not impossible to pin down any essential component of what different writers say about the hidden curriculum. Figure 1 showing the boundaries of possibility of this concept is the best one can hope for. It does not represent a neat hierarchical order as indicated but only the predominant and most useful conceptions suggested by the literature.

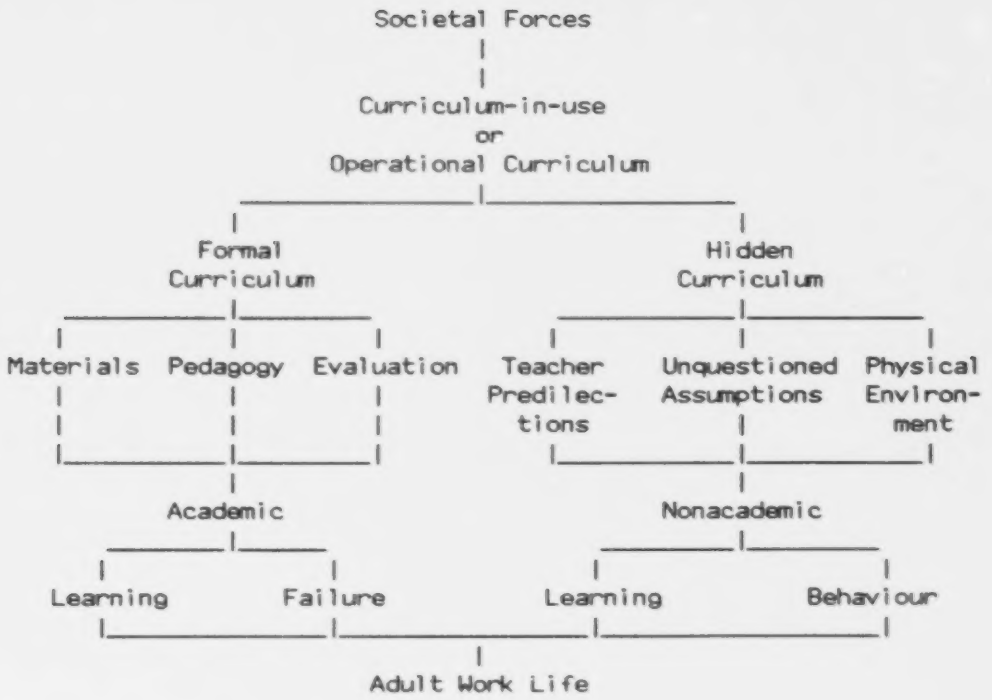

Figure 1: Boundaries of Possibility of the Conceptions of the Hidden Curriculum

All discussions on the hidden curriculum refer to some kind of societal force behind schools, such as norms and values, that produces the special effects writers intend to convey, whether they are latent functions of the formal curriculum or its unintended consequences. These writers also assume that there is a continuity between school and society; and one way or another, and at some stage, students will have to leave the former and join the latter; to serve it or to transform it is an entirely different matter.

Based on these two assumptions, speculations about what happens in schools and to students abound. In some literature, the terms "operational curriculum" and "curriculum-in-use" have been used to embrace both the formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum, whereas in other cases the latter two sub-categories have been interpreted as taking opposing stances.

The difference in interpretation, as we are aware, will depend largely upon our perception and world view of things. This is where the difficulty lies when we try to establish the essential concept of any entity. The hidden curriculum is no exception. I shall call these different perceptions and world views "perspectives" and shall discuss them in greater detail in the next section. For the present, we may ask, "If there is no essential concept of the hidden curriculum and if it doesn't exist at all, why are so many scholars wasting their time and effort trying to understand it?" The answer is paradoxical. Exactly because of the invalidity of the argument

that a hidden curriculum exists, the question of who hides it and from whom it is hidden becomes important. Denis Phillips (1980) and Nicholas Burbules (1980) have provided some hints and Henry Giroux (1983a) takes the matter further.

II. The Death of the Hidden Curriculum

In his conclusion, Phillips (1980) remarks,

> Furthermore, in human affairs the wise person is on the lookout for unintended consequences--it is by capitalizing on them, as Popper suggests, that the world moves on. There is nothing in this analysis then, that would prevent us postulating that certain people or organizations in our society are profiting from the unfortunate but unintended consequences of the educational plans that we design and execute for good--and manifest--purposes. (pp.279-280)

Whilst Phillips stresses the expressed benign motives of educators as explanations for their actions, Burbules (1980) argues that at times we have to consider their hidden motives as well. Burbules suggests that

> (1) For some educators, the hidden curriculum conforms to their expected motives, so...strictly speaking, there is no *hidden* curriculum here at all. (2) For most educators...their teaching practices have unintended consequences...explanation in these cases relies on both a recognition of the sincere and unambiguously benign motives of teachers...and an analysis of those structural and organizational characteristics of schools which compromise and frustrate these motives...(3) For still other educators, their expressed motives may be benign, but they are confused and self-deceived....In such cases, we may be justified in questioning whether or not these teachers harbor *hidden motives*... (pp.288-289)

He then concludes that

> *No one* hides the hidden curriculum, except insofar as researchers, evaluators, and educators do recognize the latent functions of educational practices without attempting to challenge or to change them. (p.289)

While Burbules claims that educators are reluctant to challenge or to change the latent functions which they recognize, Phillips postulates that certain people (I presume he means educators) are in fact profiting from the unintended consequences of education.

A few interesting points follow from the above. First, by shifting the emphasis of something called "the hidden curriculum" to other phenomena called "latent functions", "unintended consequences", and "human motives", we do not necessarily promote the understanding of the concept of the hidden curriculum. All we do perhaps is to show that such a concept was malformed in the first instance and therefore is untenable. In other words, we should abandon any further pursuit of our understanding of this concept.

Second, the fact that Burbules claims that "no one hides the hidden curriculum" still suggests that "a hidden curriculum" exists. This however, I believe, is not what he wants to say. What he is alluding to is that the hidden curriculum is only a phenomenon which exists in the minds of the educators. His three explanations suggest that this phenomenon may be part of the manifest curriculum, it may make the educators feel constrained, or it may even deceive them if they are confused about their motives. A phenomenon, however, cannot change its form so radically and instantly, and even though psychologists may warn us that perception is selective, the divergent reactions of educators render the existence of the hidden curriculum suspect.

And third, if no one hides the hidden curriculum, as Burbules asserts, then it will be "visible" to everybody. But this is not what most literature on the hidden curriculum suggests. Burbules stresses the motives of the agents (educators, researchers, and so on) but has omitted the party often regarded as crucial to the studies of the hidden curriculum--the students. If students have been ignored in Burbules's discussion on the hidden curriculum, the so-called "hidden curriculum" may still be "hidden" from them even though no one deliberately hides it. If not, Burbules's explanation is at best incomplete.

Giroux (1983a), like any other radical critics, follows up this loose end. He believes that debates on the hidden curriculum "have reached their theoretical limits" and that the whole issue of the hidden curriculum needs to be reconceptualized. His radical approach focuses on the political economy of schooling as well as the self-control and resistance of students. I do not want to pursue this point now as it is only one way of interpreting the hidden curriculum, but I tend to agree with him that

> What are at stake in the divergent styles and modes of analyses that make up the literature on the hidden curriculum are deep-seated philosophical and ideological perspectives that clash over the very meaning and nature of social reality....Consequently, before *the concept of the hidden curriculum can be used as a theoretical tool* [my italics]...it is important to understand and critique the ideological assumptions embedded in the perspectives under study. (pp.47-48)

I have emphasized "the concept of the hidden curriculum can be used as a theoretical tool" but have omitted what Giroux says after that, which is "for developing a critical pedagogy". From the analyses of both Phillips's and Burbules's work above, and from my studies of other literature, I have come to the tentative conclusion (1) that the concept of the hidden curriculum is but a creation of the educators; (2) that such a concept has been explained in terms

of their ideological perspectives; and (3) that the concept has been used as a theoretical tool for achieving their political ideals and in the case of educational failure, exploited as a scapegoat to defend their "benign" motives. I shall expand on this in the next section. For the present, I would say that Giroux's claim for developing a critical pedagogy fits into my third conclusion, and I I would even go further to say that his analysis of the various perspectives of studying the hidden curriculum together with his political ideals is a subset of my general conclusions.

In Figure 2 I have made a schematic comparison of what my studies of the hidden curriculum portray and what Giroux believes to be the development of research in this field. The links between the ideological orientations and the different approaches are mine and I shall return to them in the next section. As far as I can see, the debate on the hidden curriculum has subsided since late 1984. A recent computer search indicates that there are no further journal articles or conference papers available on this topic. This phenomenon may be what Giroux calls the "theoretical limits" of debates on the hidden curriculum, but I would suggest that the situation is more serious than that. It might be one of Kuhn's paradigm shift crises or of Foucault's signs of historical discontinuity.

One way or another, if a hidden curriculum, as an entity, existed before, it is now dead. If none survived so far, we may have to critically inquire into the rise and fall of its alleged existence. In either case, we have to prepare ourselves for the onset of a new crisis. A new paradigm however is unlike some new clothes we put on after we discard old ones. Old values and ideas are couched in the transformed ones. In other words, we have to look at the hidden curriculum with a different pair of, hopefully not coloured, glasses.

III. The Discursive Function of the Hidden Curriculum

In this section I shall concentrate on Figure 2 and I shall discuss Giroux's (1983a) analysis parallel with mine. I have used the term "discursive function" in the heading for a special reason and to express a specific meaning and I hope it will become clear as the discussion goes on.

The different perspectives of studying the hidden curriculum may be viewed as lying on a continuum with the conservatives at one extreme and the radical critics at the other. Other perspectives fall somewhere between the two.

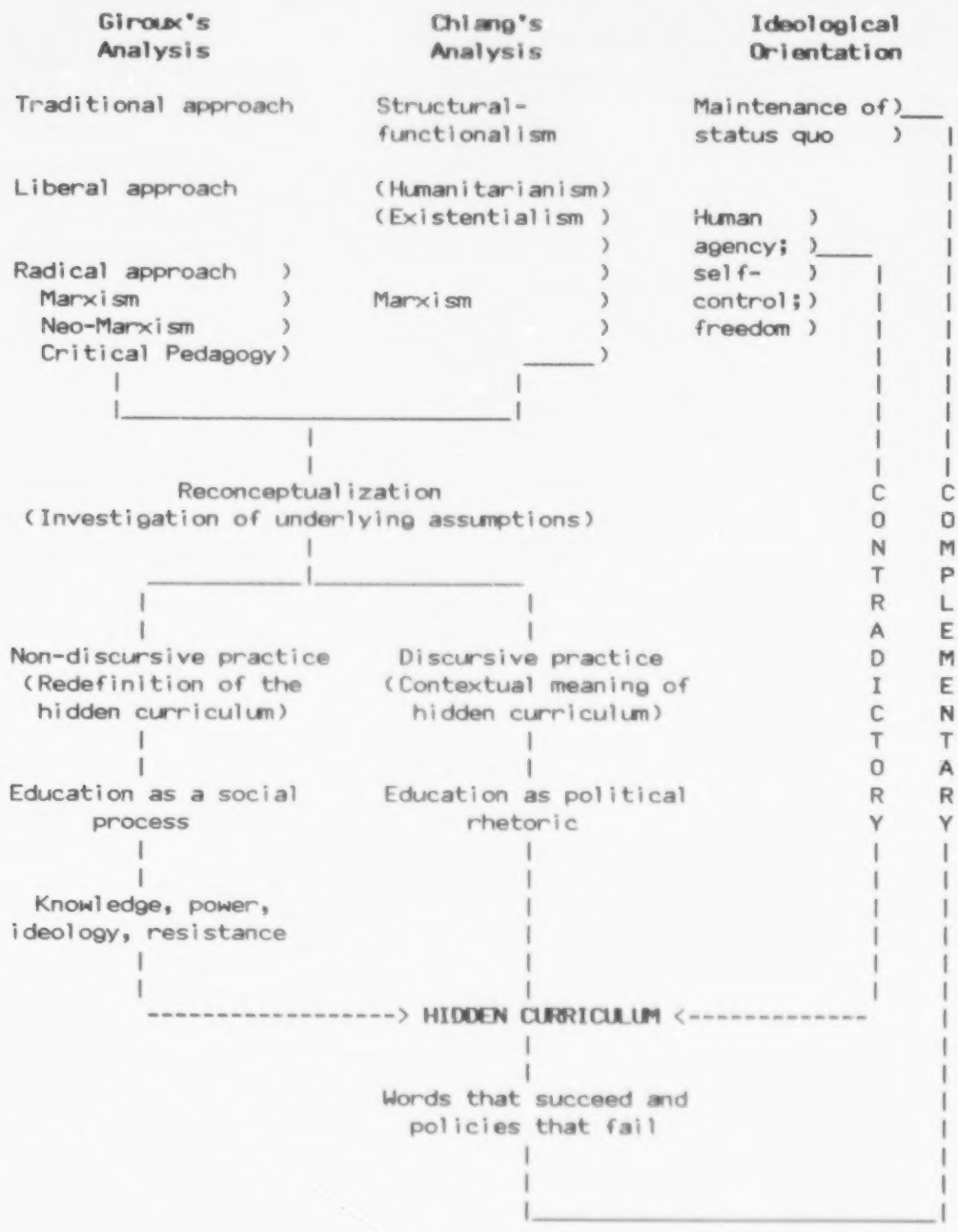

Figure 2: Perspectives of the Hidden Curriculum
(Giroux's Analysis--Source, 1983a, pp.43-71)

At the top of the figure, Giroux describes the most common approach as "traditional". He points out that works by Jackson (1968) and Dreeben (1968) are classic examples. He claims that "the key assumption that governs its [this approach's] problematic is that education plays a fundamental role in maintaining the existing society" (p.48). He further asserts that

> In the end, the notions of conflict and ideology disappear from this perspective, and the question of the abuse or neglect of power both within and outside of schools evaporates behind a static and reified view of the larger society. (p.49)

Because explanations here are typically based on the structure and functions of schools as a collective social agent, I have called this perspective structural-functional rather than traditional; but I concur with Giroux's view on the "key assumption" of this approach. I also agree that the functionalists' view is "static and reified" but would argue that they do so not because they are unaware of the need for reform, but because of their conviction that conservatism is better than innovation. Educators such as Jackson and Dreeben wrote about the "undesirable" ways of school life to express their empathy towards the community concern that schools are failing to fulfil the latter's expectations, but in the meantime introduce the concept of the hidden curriculum to help them explain, as Phillips (1980, p.276) puts it, "in terms of latent functions when manifest functions do not fully account for the phenomenon under consideration". In other words, the hidden curriculum has been used as their theoretical scapegoat for educational failure. Insofar as the true face of the hidden curriculum cannot be unveiled, they are safe behind this smoke screen. Meanwhile, they can continue advocating that while they try their best to eradicate the hidden curriculum we must all adapt to the fact of life.

The second perspective that Giroux discussed is the "liberal approach" where he states that "at the core of the liberal problematic is the question of how meaning gets produced in the classroom" (p.50). This approach, Giroux claims, stresses "the importance of intentionality, consciousness, and interpersonal relations in the construction of meaning and classroom experience". While he concedes that this perspective is more critical than the traditional one, he concludes that authors in this area have failed to offer illuminating explanations as to how the problem of the hidden curriculum can be overcome. He further claims that this perspective fails to address questions such as false consciousness, structural determinations, competing interpretations of social and political reality, confusion between powerlessness and passivity, and similar social issues.

Whist Giroux's analysis spans the full continuum between where functionalism finishes and where Marxism begins, my studies indicate that literature in this area is rather limited, and I have been able to identify only two distinct perspectives: humanitarianism and existentialism. Giroux's interpretation of meaning, intentionality, consciousness, and interpersonal relations undoubtedly apply to a large extent to these two perspectives. The departure from this generality is of course the emphasis each proponent places.

The central theme of humanitarianism is the "welfare of the individuals" (Vallance, 1973/74) and his/her "personal development" (Snyder, 1970). The basic assumption is that human agency is unique and significant. Proponents of this perspective claim that the hidden curriculum not only creates conflict between teachers and students but also damages the latter's personal development (see, for example, Snyder, 1970) and defies the good intention of the formal curriculum (see, for example, Overly (Ed.), 1970). Hence it is necessary to exp e it and to overcome it.

The shortcomings of this perspective, however, outnumber its merits. Its acceptance of the status quo reveals its weakest point. As Vallance (1973/74) points out, even though the shift in emphasis is towards the welfare of the individuals, social control is still dominant. Further, its incoherent theoretical stance has rendered it vulnerable to attacks. "Child-centred progressive education", for example, Musgrove (1978) remarks, "ensure[s] the reproduction of social inequality and the continued dominance of the ruling class". But, these are not the proper concerns. The reference to the hidden curriculum by advocates of this perspective, like that of the functionalists, is to lay blame on it so that they can escape the responsibility of accepting failure.

Existentialism in education is an emerging theme and though it offers possibility to individuals from a different perspective (Greene, 1974), its power is limited. For the existentialists the authentic self can only be realized "through free and responsible decisions" (Macquarrie, 1972). The purpose of exposing the hidden curriculum, to the proponents of this perspective, is to enable teachers and students become culturally conscious so that they can make responsible decisions within the constraints of social control (see, for example, Bowers, 1974; Martin, 1976).

Whilst there is no attempt for the existentialists to go beyond the status quo, they have also been unable to demonstrate what specifically constitutes the hidden curriculum and what factors are imminent in the raising of cultural consciousness: the relationship between the hidden curriculum and unexamined cultural assumptions is vague at best and a speculation in reality. Their motives may appear benign but behind the facade of freedom and responsible decisions these educators have found no better reasons to account for the failure of education in preparing students to become free and responsible beings.

I shall now comment on Giroux's critique of the third approach which he called "radical perspectives". They are different phases of the development of Marxism. The tradition theory of correspondence between social relations and school relations as expounded by authors such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) has been condemned by him as "a one-sided and theoretically underdeveloped perspective on the role of the hidden curriculum" (p.58). The neo-Marxist theory that "focused more specifically on how a variety of mechanisms in the school tacitly worked in the interest of reproducing the ethos and structure of capitalist society" and in producing "a whole range of meanings that represent selections from the ideological and cultural resources of dominant interest groups" (p.59) as argued for by Apple and King (1971), has also been dispensed with as "far too undialectical" (p.60).

What Giroux is trying to achieve is to realize his "critical pedagogy" which aims to critically examine both the intentional and unintentional consequences of the nature and construction of thought and to promote self-awareness in teachers and students in terms of the labour process of schooling (pp.60-70). To Giroux, schools, like the workplace, "represent contested terrains marked not only by structural and ideological contradictions but also by collectively informed student resistance [conflicts and struggle for autonomy]" (Giroux, 1983b, p.260). Hence, it is impossible, he claims, to understand the hidden curriculum without reconceptualizing it.

But to the extent that the hidden curriculum is presumed existing, any reconceptualization, whether it be in the form of a social process, knowledge, power, ideology, or resistance, is doomed to flounder. The formal curriculum to the radical critics is embedded with the ideology of capitalist society and is therefore a hidden curriculum. The rejection of unwanted capitalist ideology through the collective identity of "counter-school culture" as exemplified by the oft-cited Willis's (1977) ethnographic study of the "working-class kids" has brought about the reverse effect: by rejecting mental labour and enshrining manual labour, the Willis kids have grown weaker in their ability to transform school into their ideals. And by denouncing the notion of the hidden curriculum, they have become more enslaved to it.

To the radical critics, anything which is not conforming to their ideology is a hidden curriculum but it is quite plain to see that this is merely a political rhetoric. If these critics have to practice Marx's belief that the ultimate task of philosophy and theory was not to comprehend reality but to change it, they must have a good reason to do so. The hidden curriculum provide a convenient starting point.

This brings my discussion to the discursive function of the hidden curriculum that I mentioned at the beginning of this section. Vallance (1973/74, p.19) has pointed out that "the hidden curriculum is so deeply embedded in our whole conception of schooling that while it no longer needs to be made explicit, neither can it merely be washed away". Even though the hidden curriculum does not exist as an entity and neither is there any essential concept of it, it is impracticable if not impossible to cast it away because of the way we have been conditioned by our socio-cultural environment.

In other words, when reconceptualizing the hidden curriculum we cannot transform it into the study of power, ideology, and resistance, as Giroux has suggested, with the image of the hidden curriculum still capturing our mind: the rejection (in the Marxist sense) of an object does not entitle us to conclude the non-existence of that object. What we need to do, as Michel Foucault (1972) claims, is to look at the conditions under which certain relationships hold; to inquire into their *a priori* historical conditions which are responsible for generating a certain concept; and to investigate how such a concept has been used in practice. The meaning of the concept in this case is insignificant compared with the way in which it has been legitimated through usage by the power of language. This is what Foucault calls "discursive practice" and I have used the term "discursive" in such a sense.

To quote Foucault,

> discourse [refers to] a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation; it does not form a rhetorical or formal unity, endlessly repeatable, whose appearance or use in history might be indicated (and, if necessary, explained); it is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined....
>
> [and] 'discursive practice' can now be defined more precisely. It must not be confused with the expressive operation by which an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image; nor with the rational activity that may operate in a system of inference; nor with the 'competence' of a speaking subject when he constructs grammatical sentences; it is a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function. (p.117)

In this sense, Giroux's reconceptualization of the hidden curriculum refers to the non-discursive practice such as classroom activities and student resistance. The essence of such approach is hermeneutical but repeated interrogations, Foucault claims, lead to infinite regress (especially when one operates within a framework about the presumed materialistic existence of the hidden curriculum) --what was the case for the original text now applies to the commentary itself (McDonell, 1977). Further, concepts, Foucault stresses, though not existing in isolation, neither aggregate nor second one another dialectically. They simply appear alongside one another, catastrophically, without rhyme or reason. What is more, the appearance of a new concept (the reconceptualization of the hidden curriculum in this case) does not represent a revolution in thought or consciousness, it merely fills the spaces left by the discourse of earlier sciences (White, 1973).

The dialectical understanding of the hidden curriculum in terms of power, ideology, and resistance, as Giroux advocates, then reduces to a political rhetoric nothing more sophisticated than either that of his conservative or liberal opponents. Power in this situation refers to that which is derived from the language generated through discursive practice rather than that of the struggle for freedom and self-control. Ideology at the same time is legitimated as a goal worth pursuing. And to achieve that resistance and conflicts are seen as useful ammunition for the battle.

If we stop for a moment and consider our perception of world phenomena, we will not be surprised that the way we think is much affected by the historical conditions which we take for granted, consciously or unconsciously. But we tend to see what we want to believe to be the case and we are inclined to reinforce our convictions by introducing new elements to an otherwise neutral or even non-existent object.

We are all familiar with the following typical gestalt switch test of optical illusion in psychology. The first figure on the left of the series indicates the division of space into positive and

negative domains. Depending upon our familiarity with either a vase or the two human faces, we will see the figure as consisting of one or the other phenomenon. The middle figure shows how we see the two human faces more emphatically when we manipulate the spatial relationship between the positive and negative parts. The converse is true of the last figure.

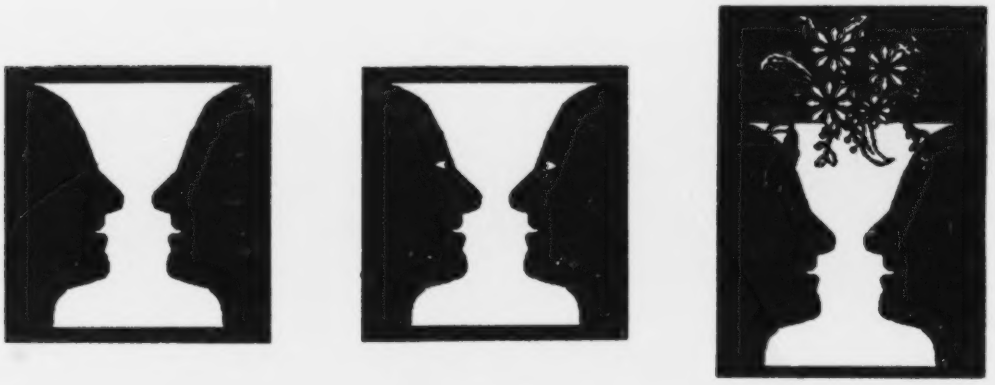

Figure 3: The Gestalt Switch
(Source, Benzon, 1985, p.116)

Similarly, we can imagine ourselves viewing a spider's web as consisting of silks criss-crossing each other in some interesting ways. It may have a regular pattern or it may be amorphous but the point I am trying to make is that we still see it as a web because of our previous understanding of spiders and webs. What we have ignored, consciously or unconsciously, is the space between the threads. The paradox, according to Betty Edwards (1979), is that the positive and negative spaces share the same edges and the two exist at the same time, by design or by accident. And although these two types of spaces are equally important, we only notice the existence of the positive ones because "*we know too much about them*". The shape of the web, therefore, can be a result of the artful manipulation of either the silks or the negative space, as we have seen with the case of the vase and the faces. Figure 4 shows the situation.

At all times, researchers in the hidden curriculum concentrate on the individual threads, arguing about the methodology that will lead them to the truth which they believe lies in the middle of the web. Some of them, Giroux for example, try to expand on the level of sophistication by discussing perspectives in addition. But none so far has noticed the silent force of discursive practice in the negative space between the silks that also shapes the form of the web.

This silent force, as Foucault argues, does not grow out of one person's imagination. It acquires its meaning through the institutional status of the material governing its uses. One such set of conditions is our familiarity with opposite entities: pairs of concepts such as we-they; male-female; scientific-mythical;

savage-domesticated; and so on. Osgood et al.'s (1957) semantic differential provides further variety of examples. All these phenomena, together with the fact that we are born into a world which is filled with moral standards such as good and bad, right and wrong, and fair and unfair, initialize us into thinking that it is quite legitimate to believe in other concepts such as formal curriculum-informal curriculum, intended outcome-unintended outcome, and so on. We may have no evidence to support our belief but we presume that it is an acceptable practice to do so.

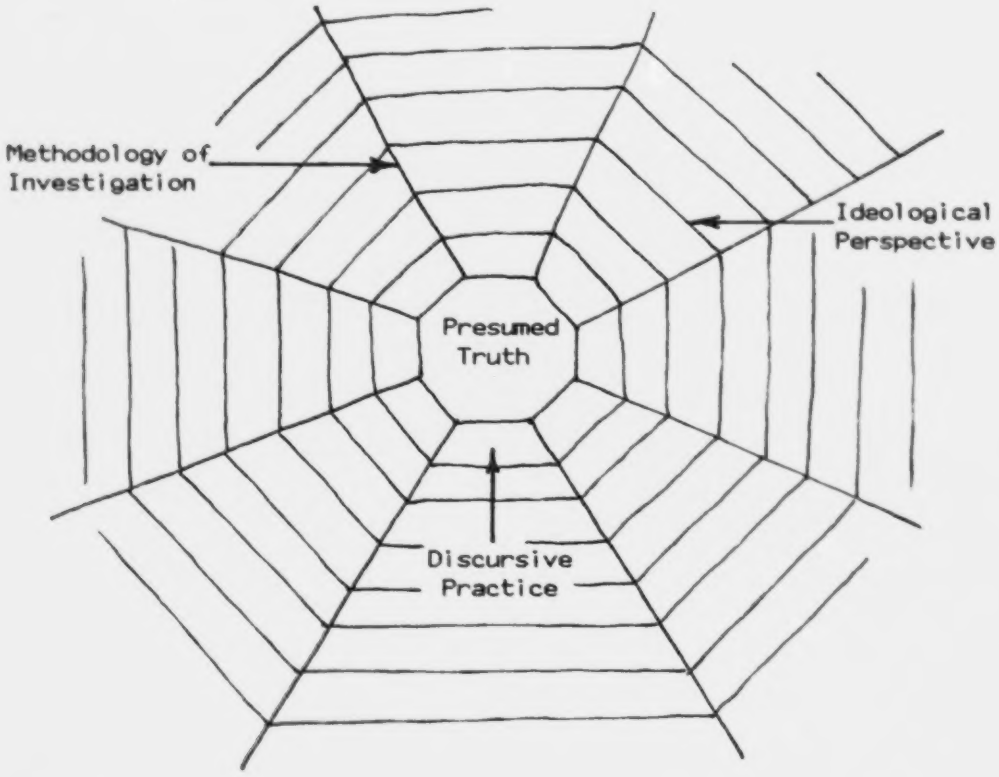

Figure 4
The Spider's Web Metaphor of the Hidden Curriculum

As a byproduct of our dichotomous thinking, we would feel quite confident to believe that if explicit curriculum-hidden curriculum is an acceptable pair of entities, and if the former has some observable characteristics, then the latter must also possess some depictable attributes. Further, authors such as Harre (1966) talked about hierarchical classification and taxonomy of concepts, and von Bertalanffy (1968) attempted to convince us of an orderly general systems theory. As Harre (1966, p.15) maintains, "the categorial taxonomy stems from Aristotle and, indeed to this day, is essentially in its original form". These systems of thinking, reinforced by our day-to-day quest for logical and rational behaviour, contribute to our unexamined assumption that an essential concept of the hidden curriculum *must* exist.

Having convinced ourselves that a hidden curriculum exists and that it also has an essential concept, though we don't know what, we proceed to *demonstrate* our faith. We examine the various spatio-temporal continua both within and outside of schools. We anchor our investigations upon our ideological fantasies as a basis of judgement, such as the uniqueness of human nature or the necessity for maintaining the status quo. We insert our discursive practice into non-discursive practice such as pedagogy and student evaluation. All at once, we feel a sense of success without knowing that we have entered the world of deception and self-deception. A world in which we find nothing else but what Max Black (1983) calls "the prevalence of humbug"; a world in which political language prevails--something that Murray Edelman (1977) identifies as "words that succeed and policies that fail".

In his conclusion about who hides the hidden curriculum, Burbules (1980) states that

> The participle "hidden" suggests agency, suggests in fact an explicit *intention* to hide, but such is rarely the case. Rather, a subtle and careful study of the hidden curriculum would have to include an explanation for how benign motives are subverted and compromised by the structure and organization of schools and society, or how the motives of educators may be consciously benign, but unconsciously characterized by ideological bias, self-deception, or simple inconsistency. (pp.289-290)

Whilst I support his assertions about the suggestion of the agency's explicit intention to hide and about how his consciously benign motives may be unrealized, I would suggest that the remainder of the conclusion needs critical examination.

To conclude, I would like to refer back to Figure 2. Undoubtedly, from the literature we are convinced that the so-called hidden curriculum creates some undesirable effects in schools and schooling, and it is contradictory to the explicit benign motives of many educators which we cannot ignore. What we do not want to do is to deceive ourselves by transforming the phenomenon of the hidden curriculum into some kind of political rhetoric which is complementary to the desire to maintain the status quo. We have to critically examine how our benign motives are in fact subverted by our self-deception, a deception of the political ideal to which we aspire, rather than something external to us, such as the structure and functions of schools and society.

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